The NEWS LETTER

OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

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A Letter and Its Reply

April 18, 1939

To the Executive Committee of the Modern Language Association

Gentlemen:

Last December approximately 300 college teachers of English assembled and voted by a large majority in favor of organization. In their resolution the phrase "independent organization" was carefully avoided in order to leave their representatives free to discuss the possibilities and advantages of operating autonomously within the Modern Language Association or the National Council of Teachers of English. The small group responsible for bringing this first meeting about was asked to continue as a steering committee until some formal organization could be perfected.

This organization now formally exists, operating under officers pro tem. The enrolled membership now includes representatives from a few more than 100 colleges and universities throughout the country. These members have already expressed the hope that whether or not their organization continues an independent existence it should arrange to meet at a time and a place which would make attendance at MLA meetings possible; and that there be the greatest possible degree of collaboration. But they are primarily interested in classroom teaching of literature and composition, and in criticism and appreciation.

I am directed to ask you whether you would welcome the collaboration of such a group, a great proportion of whose members are also members of MLA; or whether you would propose to us some method whereby we might become an autonomous body within the MLA. Your action on this question will be reported at once to our membership.

In attempting to anticipate possible questions, I add the following facts. It is our intention to elect permanent officers as soon as possible; machinery for the selection of a nominating committee is now in operation. A second committee will draft a permanent constitution for the consideration of our members, emphasis being placed upon simplicity of organization and limitation of numbers to those actually teaching English to undergraduates. Because of the interest in this organization shown by Mr. John Erskine, Mr. Hervey Allen, and other teachers who are now writers, we shall gladly provide for such membership.

One of our members now abroad has undertaken to approach the officers of the English Society with a view toward affiliation.

Finally, it seems appropriate to say that Dr. Robert Gay and myself, who have borne the brunt of this organizing effort, greatly desire to withdraw from leadership when the organization is either operating under its own steam or is an autonomous part of some larger society. Its continuance seems inevitable, and the letters now coming to us from many parts of the country expressing thanks and offering aid and encouragement are most rewarding; but we hope to see younger men at the helm.

May I personally express thanks for your courtesy in lending the facilities of your office to us, so that this inquiry might be sent to you in time for your meeting; and add the request that you grant me a few moments to appear before your committee in order to answer briefly any questions that might immediately arise.

Very sincerely yours,

Burges Johnson

For the C.E.T.A.

Signed also by the following representative members in lieu of a committee:

Robert Gay, Chairman of Department, Simmons College
Henry Canby, Yale University
John Erskine, New York City
R. W. Pence, Chairman of Department, DePauw University
Frank Prentice Rand, Chairman of Department, Mass. State College
Francis P. Donnelly, S.J., Fordham University
Sculley Bradley, University of Pennsylvania
Harold Binkley, Head of Department, Juniata College
C. T. Ryan, Head of Department, State Teachers College, Kearney, Neb.
H. G. Owen, Dean, Middlebury College
W. Powell Jones, Western Reserve University
C. M. Newman, Head, Language Dept., Virginia Polytechnic Instit.
Carl J. Weber, Head of Department, Colby College
Edith Mirrieless, Stanford University
E. J. Weekes, Berea College
Albert M. Turner, University of Maine
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Robert T. Fitzhugh, University of Maryland
Raymond E. Dixon, Virginia Military Institute
Roy P. Basler, Head of Department, Alabama State Teachers College
Homer H. Nugent, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Frederick Hard, Dean of Newcomb College, Tulane University
Reed Smith, Dean of Graduate School, University of So. Carolina
John E. Uhler, Louisiana State University
Mary Dee Long, Sweet Brier College
G. B. Saul, Conn. State College

May 5, 1939

Dear Professor Johnson:

The Executive Council of the Modern Language Association of America, after hearing your explanation of the origin and purposes of the new provisionally named "College English Teachers Association," voted: "that the Secretary of the Modern Language Association be requested to exchange courtesies with the College English Teachers Association in the arrangement of annual meetings." Less formally it was suggested that an announcement of this new organization be included in the next number of our Publications.

This announcement has now been sent to our printers, to appear in the June issue of **PMLA**. Your preference for a time and place of meeting will be met, so far as it does not conflict with the meetings previously arranged.

Sincerely yours,

Percy W. Long

Secretary.

Announcement By M.L.A.

The following announcement appears in the May issue of the Publications of the Modern Language Association:

4. **College English Teachers Association.** — With this provisional name an association is being formed, primarily for teachers of undergraduate courses in English literature and composition, who are not concerned chiefly with research on the one hand, or teacher training on the other. Committees of the association are now engaged in preparing a slate of permanent officers, in drafting a constitution for submission to the membership, and outlining some plan for regional meetings to supplement the annual meeting held in conjunction with MLA. Inquiries should be addressed to Professor Robert Gay, of Simmons College, Boston, or to Professor Burges Johnson, of Union College, Schenectady, New York. The annual dues ($1.00) may be sent to the pro tem treasurer, Professor W. R. Richardson, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.

The Council has voted to extend to this association the same courtesies for associated meetings which have been extended to associations of teachers in the foreign languages.

Summer Luncheons In New York

So many members of the College English Association will be in New York City at one time or another during the summer that it has occurred to some of the members to suggest a meeting place and a series of informal luncheons. This involves the selection of a hotel where rates are reasonable and will not be raised during the time the World's Fair is open. Hotel Great Northern, familiar to many teachers, has given this assurance to us. Room rates range from $2.50 per day upward for one person and $3.50 per day upward for two. Additional persons will be accommodated in any room at a rate of $2.00 per person. A special luncheon in a private dining room will be provided for $1.00 per plate, if enough announce intention to attend; otherwise a group of tables would be provided in a regular dining room at reasonable a la carte rates. The following dates are suggested for luncheon meetings: Monday, July 2nd; Monday, August 7th; Monday, August 28th. College teachers of English planning to be in New York on any one of those dates will please notify the manager of Hotel Great Northern, 118 W. 57th Street, New York City, so that there may be some estimate of the size of room needed for the luncheon group. In the case of the luncheon on July 2nd, please send a post card to Dr. Burges Johnson, Union College, Schenectady, New York. Attendance at these luncheons need not be limited to enrolled members of the association; but enrolled members who wish to engage rooms at the Great Northern during their stay in New York will receive special attention if they will mention their membership when writing in advance for reservations. The hotel is easy of access on a "boulevard street," with entrances also on 56th Street. The theatre center is within easy walking distance, and subways and busses close by.

Sectional Meeting in New England

Plans are now in the making to call an organization meeting of the New England Section of the COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION on the 3rd and 4th of November, in Worcester, Mass., in conjunction with the meeting of the New England Association of Teachers of English. A program of interest to college teachers will be arranged.

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PROPOSED CONSTITUTION OF CEA

Article I. NAME

The name of this organization is College English Association.

Article II. PURPOSE

Its objects are: the establishment and maintenance of high standards in the teaching of English literature and oral and written composition; the furtherance of cooperation and mutual understanding among teachers of these subjects; and collaboration with other organizations of teachers seeking similar objectives within their own fields of activity.

Article III. MEMBERSHIP

Membership shall be limited to: (a) those already enrolled at the time this constitution goes into effect; (b) teachers in four-year colleges of recognized standing who are teaching classes in English literature or English composition at the undergraduate level; (c) those who have retired from such teaching as defined above, either by reason of age or in order to devote themselves to imaginative writing or literary criticism; (d) chairmen of English departments in such colleges, who have responsibility for such teaching as is described above. The Secretary is empowered to admit to membership, upon payment of their dues, all applicants conforming to these specifications; but in any case of doubt as to eligibility to submit the question to the membership committee whose decision shall be final.

Article IV. RESIGNATIONS

Resignations of members shall be effective when made to the Secretary in writing, and when dues for the current year have been paid.

Article V. DUES

Dues shall be determined by vote of the members at any annual meeting and shall be effective until changed by such vote at a later annual meeting.

Dues shall be payable Jan. 1. Members in arrears of dues for a full year shall be dropped.

Article VI. OFFICERS

Sec. 1. The officers shall be a President, two Vice-Presidents, a Secretary, a Treasurer, and a board of eight Directors, chosen from the membership. All officers and directors hold office until their successors are elected.

Sec. 2. Duties of the President and Vice-President: the President, or in his absence one of the Vice-Presidents, shall preside at the meetings of the Association, and of the Board of Directors. In the event of absence of all three from a meeting of the Association or of the Board, the Directors present may select presiding officers. The President or a Vice-President shall appoint all authorized committees not otherwise appointed, and shall, with the Secretary, sign all written contracts and obligations, and shall perform such other duties as the Board of Directors may assign. They shall serve for a term of one year and may not serve for more than two consecutive terms. They shall be ex-officio members of the Board of Directors.

Sec. 3. The Secretary shall send out notices of all meetings of the Association and of the Board of Directors and shall see that the minutes of such meetings are kept. He shall conduct the correspondence and keep the records of the association. He shall furnish to the Treasurer the names of all persons admitted to membership. He shall be empowered to incur obligations only in so far as he has been authorized to do so by the Board of Directors; and he shall draw up a budget of proposed expenditures for the coming year and submit it to the Board of Directors for their approval at the annual meeting. He shall serve for a term of three years and may be reelected to succeed himself. He shall be an ex-officio member of the Board of Directors.

Sec. 4. The Treasurer shall collect all dues and shall keep the accounts of the association and report thereon to the Board of Directors at the annual meeting and at such other times as he is called upon. He shall pay all bills which have the approval of the Secretary and one other officer, either President, Vice-President, or a director. He shall serve for a term of three years and may be reelected to succeed himself. He shall be an ex-offcio member of the Board of Directors.

Sec. 5. The Directors derive their authority from the members and shall govern and manage the association in accordance with the constitution and subject to instructions of the members as indicated at the annual meeting. They shall be eight in number, chosen from the membership and representing as many different sections of the country as is expedient; geographical distribution may be specified in the by-laws. Each director shall be elected for a term of three years, and no more than two shall retire from office in any one year. In case of death or resignation of a director the Board shall have the power to elect a successor to serve until the next annual meeting.

The directors shall authorize a budget of expenditures for each year, and shall have sole power to approve any expenditures in excess of that budget.

Decisions of the Board of Directors shall be final if made at any meeting where seven directors are present in person or represented by proxy.

Article VII. COMMITTEES

Sec. 1. A Nominating Committee shall be chosen by the members at each annual meeting to serve for one year. Its duty shall be to prepare a slate of officers which shall be mailed to the members at least a month in advance of the next annual meeting.

Sec. 2. A Program Committee, a Membership Committee of three directors, and such other committees as may from time to time become necessary, shall be appointed by the President immediately after his assumption of office, to serve for one year.

Article VIII. MEETINGS

Sec. 1. The annual meeting of the organization shall be held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association, at the same time and place, unless otherwise determined in any one year by the Board of Directors for reasons that seem to it good and sufficient, and notification shall be made to all members of such change at least two months in advance of the usual time of meeting.

Sec. 2. Special meetings may be called by the President and the Board of Directors when they shall deem it advisable.

Sec. 3. Regional meetings shall be encouraged wherever a large enough group of the members find it possible to assemble and at such time as they see fit. The effectiveness of the action of members assembled at such regional meetings shall be defined in the by-laws.

Sec. 4. Proxies representing members not in attendance may be counted in determining a quorum only if they be in writing, and apply to the one meeting only, and specify matters upon which the bearer may vote.

Sec. 5. Members present at any annual meeting may transact business and their decisions shall be binding upon the whole membership if more than one-fourth of the paid up members of the association are present. If less than one-fourth are present, action taken must be referred by mail to the whole membership. This action shall then be binding upon the association, if a majority negative vote is not received by the Secretary within thirty days after such submission.

Article IX. AMENDMENTS

This constitution may be amended at any annual meeting by vote of two-thirds of the membership, either present in person or voting by mail as provided in the by-laws; but no amendment may be voted upon at any meeting unless a copy has been mailed to each of the members at least one month in advance of the date of meeting.

Just by Way of Controversy

For years I have found many of our young men made poor college teachers by trying to carry over into their classes the interests and methods of their dull graduate work. I say dull advisedly, for at the universities where most of our men have been trained there seems to be not the slightest appreciation of literature as one of the fine arts, but only an insistence upon the minutiae of philological and biographical facts, and usually upon facts relating to a person of no literary importance. When I have offered our men subjects and even preliminary studies in somewhat wider fields, they have been rejected by the universities to which they have been offered. Why, I can only guess. My notion is first that the professors in charge did not want to supervise topics about which they knew nothing, and second that they wished to subdivide a large, worthy topic into minute studies. Some time ago I offered two of our men all the material I had on what I may call the poets of protest from about 1830 to 1860, a list of about 44 men, bibliographies, and brief biographies, but the topic was rejected, although nothing worth while has ever been written on it. However, since then, two men have made studies of two of these minor writers for their doctorates; neither, probably, worth more than twenty-five pages.

The point of all these words is merely that graduate schools prepare men for detailed research in trifling subjects, and give them nothing of the appreciation and understanding of literature that is essential to one who tries to instill in college students some understanding of literature and some interest in it. And it seems to me that the growing emphasis on such pedantic work must be counteracted if college teaching is to be saved from the pedants.

Perhaps you will forgive me for letting off a lot of steam, but I have been het up about the matter for years. It may be that some day the C.E.A. may tell a college teacher of English what he should teach, and emphatically what he should not.

Sincerely yours,

A. D. Compton,
The College of the
City of New York.

If and When We Print

Should not our organization emphasize criticism more than teaching? Would it, or would it not, be sound policy to exclude English teachers in junior colleges? This question is not put with a snobbish motive. I simply feel that a smaller organization, with a sharply defined purpose, is better than a larger catch-all.

Should not our journal offer: (a) a periodic check-list of critical articles in all journals upon major literary figures or trends, particularly American and contemporary; (b) a well-planned series of articles by authorities, upon questions of aesthetics; (c) another well-planned series upon important figures in literature, — reinterpretations, if you please; (d) still another series upon basic educational aims—something to give back to the English teacher some faith in the value of what he is trying to do?

In short, do wo not need a planned program leading to a kind of re-education of ourselves?

Dudley Wynn,
The University of New Mexico

Even with the first announcements of the CEA it is not too early to remind ourselves that the aim of the organization is not only to foster discussion about teaching composition, but also to encourage the kind of scholarship known largely in America through its dearth; the kind of scholarship represented in the Essays and Studies of the British English Association. As an organization for those interested primarily in research, MLA is fulfilling a major need of the profession; as an organization for those interested in educational techniques, the National Council is likewise doing a major work. There is room for and need of some organ which can publish mature and scholarly literary criticism which does not spring entirely from research, and the CEA should meet this need. Undoubtedly many of those teaching in colleges, especially, are able and eager to write the kind of essay on literary matters which such men as C. S. Lewis, E. M. W. Tillyard, and Oliver Elton regularly write; they are lacking an outlet for such essays and receive no recognition if they do write them. Here, if anywhere, the CEA can be of genuine service to American scholarship and of great value to its members.

F. W. Sypher,
Simmons College.

A Major in Composition

At Wayne University an interesting discussion is now going on, and English teachers are divided. We should be grateful for expressions of opinion on one side or the other, or testimony as to experience, from members of the College English Association.

Those of us who teach advanced composition, such as creative writing, professional forms of writing, and courses in criticism, are dissatisfied with the report of our senior college committee, which has failed to include in the undergraduate English major requirements any composition courses other than freshman composition I & II; and no composition is included for graduate school preparation or departmental recommendation other than the freshman composition and an elective course on thesis writing.

Our position is that the conventional English major has not adequately served students desiring to take courses in advanced composition. Since this English major, rather narrowly specialized, has been developed largely with the advanced literature courses in mind, and accepted as satisfactory for that purpose, we feel that a new major should be outlined (called, perhaps, a major in rhetoric and composition) in which foundation courses in literature would be taught from the standpoint of criticism and appreciation. The required courses in the composition major would ,therefore, be literature courses, but without the traditional strong emphasis upon historical periods. There would, of course, be the usual courses in freshman composition.

Howard Mumford Jones pointed out some time ago in a magazine article that most college courses in literature are concerned with literary history or sociology rather than with criticism. Some of us would add, too, that these courses in literature tend to neglect appreciation. The traditional English major has been too narrowly specialized to serve as a satisfactory background for composition students.

Discussion of this problem brings out the fact that there is further division of opinion over the acceptance of courses in advanced composition for graduate credit. One view is that traditional graduate research is impossible in composition. Others hold that vauable as traditional research in English literature may be, there may be equal value and importance in the investigation of such subjects as the influence of the King James Version on English prose; or, to cite a specific publication, **Shakespeare's Image** by Caroline Spurgeon. Is the contribution by Caroline Spurgeon of less value than Charles William Wallace's discovery of Shakespeare's London address in the Mountjoy house merely because the one is in composition and the other is the history of literature?

Does not the increasing number of graduate students enrolling in composition courses without credit indicate that such students should be more liberally provided for in the English curriculum?

To come back to the original question relating to undergraduate studies in English, should not the traditional major, with its narrowly conceived aims in literature, either be completely overhauled, or an entirely new major be organized for students looking forward to graduate study in composition, requiring more strongly cultural courses in literature, rhetorical theory, ancient and modern, in the history of the English language, and the like?

I shall appreciate very much receiving opinions and information concerning these problems from other colleges.

Cordially yours,
C. C. Certain
Wayne University,
Detroit, Mich.

A Hope and a Definition

I hope that the new national organization may be the expression of those who think that while pedagogy is of the first importance, and while research and scholarship are necessary, the former is and should be taken for granted in all English teachers of every grade, and the latter should be the work of specialists more or less free from undergraduate teaching. But an enthusiasm for the cultural side of English teaching, for the great books of the world, and for the best that has ever been thought and said as such finds at present no organization to represent the many professors who would not teach English at all if thise were not the motive of their work. My own experience is that fully one half of all English professor are most interested in philology, semantics, history of English, sources, recondite information, rare books and lesser authors, pedagogy and tests, the mechanics of writing, grammar, literary movements, periods, types, etc., etc., while books as great thoughts and the expression of great personalities, and writing as a means toward the formation of personality in students leave them comparatively cold. The other half, among whom I count myself, need a fold and a shepherd. Then, too, our new organization has no future if it trespasses to any great extent on the fields of older and stronger bodies.

Henry C. F. Staunton,
University of Notre Dame;
President, Indiana College
English Assn.

NOTICE: This circular has been sent to college English teachers throughout the country, whether or not they are members of CEA. Hereafter, only members will be addressed.

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MACMILLAN

EDITORIAL

The idea that "college English" differs in any way from secondary-school or university English may be doubtful or even repugnant to some, but a great many men and women are teaching it who have at present no medium devoted especially to their interests and no forum for discussion. Certainly also the question is at least arguable whether college English does present the same subject-matter and problems as are presented by either of the other two—in fact, few questions stand more in need of clarification.

Certain emphases in the great organizations of secondary - school teachers on the one hand and of university scholars on the other seem to many college teachers unprofitable and even dangerous. One may name the apparent tendency to vote English as a subject out of existence and to make of it only one more of the so-called "social studies"; and the tendency to view English scholarship as a scientific discipline and rationalistic technique. There would seem to be a large and fruitful ground between —call it liberal, humanistic, or what one pleases—which is the field of the undergraduate teacher; who, although he will be interested both in social applications and in research, is still most of the time concerned professionally with criticism, appreciation, and summarizing of existent knowledge.

We believe that some organization such as our own new venture may perform a valuable work in defining the field, formulating a philosophy, discussing curricula, and keeping its members informed concerning the latest results of educational experiment and literary research.

R. M. Gay

Neither the title of this sheet nor the name of the organization sponsoring it has of necessity any permanence. Neither has yet been given the endorsement of a formal vote. The former was the first title that came to mind when the Secretary pro tem. found it necessary to crowd into type a number of communications to those who have already enrolled. The latter as an organization name seemed a bit unwieldy in its first form, and several members have suggested dropping the word "teachers." That has been done experimentally. The great majority have suggested that any good name will do. A majority also evidently desire that the outstanding characteristic of publication, as well as association, shall be simplicity, lack of elaborate machinery, economy and avoidance of "politics."

The object of the association is to establish contact between college teachers having similar tasks and similar objectives. This can best be accomplished by the encouragement of regional meetings as of even greater importance than the annual meeting; the second by some publication for the exchange of professional news and suggestions.

The development of a monthly periodical to serve the interests of the members is chiefly a problem of expense; and there is a general feeling that dues, expenses of meetings, and other costs should be kept down to a minimum. It is too easy for the expenses of an annual meeting to grow gradually from year to year until attendance becomes a serious financial burden. The suggestion has been made that any publication of "C.E.A." begin in simple and inexpensive fashion and grow only as fast as is justified by actual demand. With 600 as a satisfactory and adequate membership, dues amounting to $1.50 per year would provide for a monthly leaflet such as this, the necessary stenographic assistance, and postage. With such a governing structure, correspondence could be carried on, regional meetings could be planned and encouraged, and some stimulating ideas could be exchanged among all of the members. If more than that is desired of such an association, undoubtedly it can expand its services to meet the demand.

The files of the Secretary pro tem. contain a volume's worth of letters from English teachers scattered from Corvallis, Oregon, to Hanover, New Hampshire, — from Birmingham to Los Angeles. These are rich in comment and suggestion as well as encouragement and offers of aid. Until the machinery exists they cannot all be acknowledged. But the almost unanimous wish they express that CEA should be an independent organization working in close collaboration with MLA is now an accomplished fact. The suggestion of several that friendly contact should be established with the National Council of English Teachers (perhaps through an active committee) might be a next step, after our own permanent organization is effected. As to publication, our finances compel modest beginnings. But it is suggested that the next printed communication to our membership in the autumn might have a different format, so that we may do some constructive experimenting as we grope our way toward maturity.

Brief, constructive, thought-stimulating contributions to an October issue are in order. Three hundred words are golden, five hundred are silver,—and a thousand might be crowded out.

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